When Liberty Was Born

A Romance of Love and of Our Country's Fight for Freedom

By Albert Payson Terhune

CHAPTER I.

I Lose My Temper.

I STARED down open-mouthed, dumfounded, at the mischief my clumsiness or stupidity, or both, had wrought for me.

There, strewing the muddy snow of the gutter, lay the scattered sheaf of great scarlet roses.

The bonbons, too, were everywhere—soaked, spoiled. The pretty porcelain-and-gold box that had held them was smashed to a hundred pieces against the ground.

And there, barring my way, with arms akimbo and fire-flashing eyes, stood the daintiest, fiercest atom of girlhood my country-bred eyes had ever beheld in city or country.

For a space we stood looking at each other—I, looming up bulky and gawklike in my homespun suit, coonskin greatcoat and long, muddied boots; she, indescribably lovely in her scarlet silken cloak and hood, her little flower-face aflame with wrath and her great brown eyes ablaze.

Then it occurred to me I had somewhere read or heard that 'twas monstrous bad manners to gape openly at strangers. Now, for manners, in those days, I gave scant care. Yet an unknown something (that annoyed as much as it perplexed me) suddenly made me averse to the idea that this little town-bred aristocrat should think me the uncouth and unsophisticated youth I was.

So I contrived to drag my eyes from hers, and made shift to step past her along the Beacon Street footpath to my destination.

But it seemed I had reckoned without my host (or hostess). For she halted me at my first move.

"Wait!" she commanded. And even in its anger, her voice rang as sweetly clear as a silver bell.

I stopped, involuntarily, at the imperious summons.

"Wait!" she repeated sharply. "Is Boston a howling wilderness like your own native woods that you think you can blunder against a gentlewoman in Beacon Street, upset the precious things she is carrying and then plod onward without one word of excuse?"

"I—I was not looking," I muttered, bashful as any unbreched schoolboy; "I did not see you until I chanced to jog your shoulder with my sw.nging elbow in passing and"——

"And knocked from my arms the first winter roses Boston ever saw!" she caught me up. "The roses Sir William Howe himself sent me this morning. Yes, and my comfit box of Milan porcelain! There is not such another in the colonies."

"Well," growled I, glancing down at the shattered box and bedraggled roses, "'tis done. Why make such pother over it?"

"What?" she gasped, as though doubting her own ears.

"I say," repeated I still more sullenly, "why make such fuss over a handful of weeds and a few bits of sugar? As for the china box—if sixpence will make good its loss, I"——

"Oh!" she broke in, a little whirlwind of fury. "You lout! You trapper of the forests! Must you destroy my pretty gifts—and that without a word of civil regret—but you must also seek to thrust a coin upon me? Spend your sixpence on a 'Book of Polite Manners.' They are for sale at the bookstall in Milk Street. And 'twill profit you! Or stay out of Boston until you have learned the ways of civilization."

"We be as 'civilized' in my home at Wilbraham," quoth I hotly, "as are you Boston folk. We do not frill our speech with fal-lals and spend our good money for china boxes and roses. But, for all that, it ill befits you to make mock of my home. Even if we cannot boast a populace of 17,000, as does Boston, we teach our women to hold their tongues and not rail at their betters."

"Their betters?" she repeated blankly, evidently taken aback by my sudden torrent of heavy sarcasm.

"Yes, mistress," I retorted, "their betters. Is not man ever the superior of woman? Doth not St. Paul say"——

"Oh," she cried again in impotent rage, "if only one of my father's lackeys had escorted me abroad this day! He should cane you until"——

I broke into a laugh of honest amusement.

"On Springfield Mountain," I interrupted, lazily flexing the mighty muscles of my arms and chest, "I met a black bear last year, when Lieut. Merrick's son and I had robbed her lair of its cubs. Merrick ran at her onset. I killed her with my naked hands."

"You did?" she gasped, unwilling admiration for the instant replacing wrath in her bright face. "I believe you could. You are a giant!"

Then, suddenly catching her breath, she returned to the attack.

"And the bear doubtless bequeathed to you her manners," she flashed. "Though had she manners such as yours, she richly merited death. Here! Even bears may be trained by the will power of a human being. Take your first lesson from me. Pick up those roses and give them to me!"

I stared at her, bewildered. In my farm country it was un unheard of thing in those days for a woman to dare order a man about.

We naturally expected our womenfolk to wait on and otherwise obey us. That this slender slip of a Boston girl should give me orders——

"Pick up my roses!" she commanded again. "Every one of them. And hand them to me."

"Do you take me for a slave?" I roared, all at once finding my voice and my dazed wits.

"Every true man is a slave to courtesy," she returned. "A gentleman would have been restoring my scattered treasures to me ere they fairly touched the ground, and would have overwhelmed me with humble apologies. But," she added, "for the matter of that, a gentleman would not have been so clumsy as to knock them out of my"——

"A gentleman!" I mocked boorishly. "Thank heaven, I am no fop! As for parlor tricks and pretty speeches, I have sense enough to regard them as time wasted. Wherefore"——

"Whereas," she caught me up, "they are the divine oil of life's wheels. But we digress. Pick up those roses!"

"I will not!" I snapped. "I am no"——

"Pick them up!"

"Pick them up yourself, if you value the silly weeds. I"——

"Pick them up!"

"Enough of this childish folly! I"——

"You will pick them up, bear! At once. Do you hear

such loyalty in dress. It is a comfort to find it in the hotbed of provincial rebellion."

I was watching her, and I saw a shadow as of disapproval cross her sunny little face at his flattering words. Very deliberately she tossed aside the scarlet cloak she wore and let it hang across her arm, with its white fur lining turned outward.

"You strike your colors?" cried Howe in mock display.

"The morning grows warm," she answered. "Spring will soon be here."

"Spring!" sighed Howe. "And that will mean the pestilent rebels will make some crazy demonstration. And, as legal servant of King George, I shall have to order the poor wretches mowed down."

"You do not enjoy the prospect?" she asked in a curiously muffled voice.

"I am a soldier, Mistress Marjory, not a butcher. I have fought in China, and in Europe as well. But I scarce relish marching my men against a rabble of farmers and shopfolk. These American peasants will never show fight. A riot, a charge by the regulars—and their puny insurrection will be at an end."

"Or fanned into a flame that all King George's power can never quench!" she cried impulsively.

As the impetuous words were spoken I could see her bite her lip in a sharp vexation as though at some imprudence. Howe's surprised reply I could not fully catch. For, side by side, they had moved out of my hearing. And, like the country yokel I was, I stared stupidly after them.

Yes, I could see now the difference between gentleman and lout—between townsman and farm lad. The feeling sent a new rush of rage through my blood.

A moment later I had taken a sudden, illogical resolve that was to change the whole current of my life. Yes, and a resolve that was to change the current of history as well.

CHAPTER II.

I Meet With an Adventure.

I AM Roger Sessions, farmer's son. My father was the one man of note in our tiny community who was not a rabid revolutionist. He remained stanchly a Tory, a devoted admirer of King George III. and of Lord North. And I, his only son, had been raised to think and believe as he did.

It was not until the week after my twenty-first birthday that, for the first time, I strayed more than ten miles from my home. Then (great event of my ignorant youth) I was sent to Boston to transact some business for my father. The task accomplished, I had wandered about the streets to fill in the few remaining hours until the stage coach should set out.

Boston, in the early spring of 1775, was a vast and teeming metropolis. At least, so it seemed to my country-bred ideas. It contained no fewer than 17,000 inhabitants. Often one might see full eight or nine folk on a single block of its narrow, twisting streets.

Not only plain burghers, demure maidens and farm visitors, but everywhere the smart, white-wigged, red-coated British soldiery as well. For almost 3,000 of His Majesty's regulars were garrisoned there.

It was these soldiers, above all the things I saw, who roused my admiration. They were bronzed men who had seen many lands. Their uniforms were gorgeous. They bore themselves with a haughty disdain toward the townsfolk. I longed, secretly, to be one of that glittering band.

I had read and heard that Boston was a hotbed of rebellion. Here, in 1770, had turbulent citizens been shot down by the troops in the public streets for insurrection against the King.

Here, too, in 1774, a party of rebels had shown their disapproval of His Gracious Majesty's tea tax by disguising themselves as Indians and hurling a ship's cargo of tea overboard.

I had been prepared to find brawls on every corner. But, to my surprise, a quiet, even a gloom, hung over the city. Men glanced darkly at the swaggering troops, it is true, but spoke not aloud of mutiny.

I was disappointed. I had hoped to thrash some rebel for speaking ill of the King ere I returned to Wilbraham. It would have been a fine tale to bear back to my Tory father.

I had been longing for such adventure, and had also been lost in wonder at the town's lofty buildings—some of them full three stories high—when I had blundered into Marjory Winthrop at a corner of Beacon Street, just above the Common.

And now back to my story.

My meeting with the girl, her open scorn of my hitherto self-satisfied self, the brief glimpse of Howe—all had filled me with vague resentment of my uncouth ploughboy ways and of the simple backwoods life.

Why should I spend my golden youth on a farm, the laughing stock of city folk, when I had brains and strength that would make me the equal of any man?

A soldier, strolling just ahead of me, elbowed a portly merchant off the narrow walk into the gutter. Why should I not become such a lord of creation as this redcoat? I knew there was ever a demand for recruits. I could turn my back on the farm, enlist in King George's army and earn the right to look down upon mere civilians.

Even Marjory Winthrop might, perhaps, think me less like a bear when she should see me clad in a smart scarlet coat and with powdered hair. Yes, for good or for bad, my resolve was taken.

I quickened my pace, seeking to catch up with the trooper in front of me. From him I would inquire the way to the nearest barracks, there to enlist.

If you who read are inclined to sneer at me for the impulse to give up my life as a rich farmer's son and heir for the hard, ill-paid lot of a common soldier, I will ask you to remember that I was but twenty-one, that militarism was in the very air about me, that I still smarted from Marjory's gibes at my uncouth country ways. Also, that it was my first sight of soldiers and of town life.

Out of Beacon Street into a narrower thoroughfare swaggered the trooper. By this time I was close behind him.

He came abreast of a wide-windowed shop above whose door hung a goldsmith's sign. As he passed the doorway a soberly dressed, stout man of forty emerged from the threshold.

In his outstretched hands the newcomer carefully bore a long peacock feather fan, such as those that were in use among ladies of quality. Its sticks were of wrought gold, daintily chased and carved, inlaid with tiny seed pearls and other gems of price.

The fan was a treasure, and the holder bore it carefully, as though it had been a sick child. He moved toward a coach that stood in midstreet and from whose open door a neat lady's-maid leaned.

Doubtless, thought I, this portly man was the goldsmith himself. The fan had been sent to him for repairing, and he would allow no 'prentice hand to return it to its owner's envoy.

But I had scant time for surmise. Even as I gazed, the soldier I was following cunningly tripped up the goldsmith, sent him asprawl to the ground, snatched the precious fan from his loosened grasp, and made off with it at top speed.

Before the overturned merchant could gasp "Stop, thief!" I had cleared his scrambling body at a bound, and was in full pursuit of the fleeing soldier.

That so barefaced and wanton a theft should be achieved in open daylight in a city street acted like fire on my honest country blood. I behaved on impulse, as I should have done had I seen a wandering tinker making off with one of my father's prize geese.

Down the twisting street fled the soldier with his prize. And after him I rushed. I was fleet of foot in those days, and few of the village lads could cope with me in racing.

Ere the thief had travelled a furlong I was upon him. Feeling my grip on his arm, he dropped the fan and whirled about on me, drawing the short bayonet he wore at his belt.

But I was too quick for him. Even as he thrust at me with the weapon I threw out my left arm to ward off the murderous blow. At the same time, I struck with my clenched right fist.

The bayonet, deflected, ripped through coat, shirt and skin, ploughing an ugly little cut in my forearm. But my right fist had caught the soldier on the jaw, and had dropped him limp and sputtering in the frozen mud of the roadway.

I picked up the fan, rejoicing to see it had apparently come to no hurt from its rough handling, thrust it into my pocket and turned to the fallen redcoat.

Swearing, writhing, threatening, he was slowly staggering to his feet.

My blow had been a hasty and glancing one, else he had lain long where he fell.

I caught the struggling thief by the collar of his uniform, jerked him angrily to a standing posture, and, turning, propelled him roughly before me as I retraced my steps toward the goldsmith's shop.

He was a powerful fellow, and nearly my own size. But, tug and twist as he would, he could not shake off my grip. Nor had his appalling threats moved me.

So onward I drove him, for my rustic brain was still full of resolve to take him back to the place of his theft and there to turn him over to the authorities.

We rounded a corner and came face to face with the excited goldsmith. One or two apprentices, shopkeepers, and idlers had joined in the chase.

At sight of us the hue and cry halted in amazement.

Looking back on the scene, I can well understand the reason of their astonishment. In those days the military were undisputed masters of Boston.

It would have been safer for a Colonist to raise his hand against a magistrate or a reverend clergyman than against a redcoat.

Yet here I was, a strapping Yankee yokel in homespun, roughly propelling before me a squirming British regular in full uniform.

Scant wonder the sight transfixed the group of pursuers!

"Here he is!" I cried, exultant, shoving my captive in front of the goldsmith. "And here is the pretty gewgaw he stole. Now, which of ye be the town constable? I would fain turn this cutpurse over to the law. For contact with him soils an honest man's hands. Take him, one of you."

"The man that lays hands on me," howled the wriggling soldier, "shall answer to Gen. Gage or to Sir William himself. Yes, and my fellows shall burn the roof over his head. Loose your hold on me, you Colonial boor!" he snarled over his shoulder at me, seeking in vain to tear free from my grasp. "Zounds! But things be at a pretty pass when a soldier of His Majesty's service may be manhandled by any low Colonial!"

"Things are at a worse pass," quoth I, "when His Majesty's uniform is disgraced by such as you. Here, Mr. Goldsmith, is your thief. Take him. My part in the task is done."

"Your part is that of a gallant if rash man," answered the goldsmith, speaking in a pleasantly modulated voice. "And from my heart I thank you. The fan could not have been replaced for a hundred guineas; a loss I could ill afford. And I could still less afford to note the grief its loss must have cost Mistress Marjory Winthrop, who left it with me for mending. If"——

Marjory Winthrop again!

And that thick head that I was, had unwittingly prepaid her scorn by doing her this monstrous great service! Once more my tanned cheeks grew red with anger. And I vented some of my rage by giving my fuming prisoner an extra shake to still his struggles and his profanity.

"I want no thanks," I made surly answer to the goldsmith. "I but wish the constable or some other to take this scoundrel off my hands. I"——

"Turn him loose," requested the goldsmith, in a voice whose outward gentleness seemed barely to mask some ill-concealed emotion.

"Turn him loose!" I echoed, while from the little crowd that had gathered arose a murmur of angry disapproval. "Turn him loose? Is it thus the great city of Boston deals with criminals? If so, I thank my stars I be a rustic. Is there no justice in this town of yours?"

No!" bellowed a shock-headed blacksmith in the crowd. "None for free-born Americans. For such as we there is but"——

"Silence!" ordered the goldsmith. He spoke quietly. Yet there was a ring of authority in his deep voice that stilled the blacksmith and hushed the increasing murmur of the crowd.

"You treason-breathing dogs!" howled the soldier, getting his breath at last, after the mighty shake I had given him. "Soon enough ye shall taste good British justice, one and all of ye! And there shall not one stone of your miserable Boston town be left standing on another. A century hence the very name of Boston shall be forgot. As for this outrage upon a soldier of King George"——

"Down with tyrants!" was shouted. A stone whizzed through the air. The missile grazed the soldier's powdered head, and struck me full on the shoulder.

Again in impotent fury, stung by the pain, I shook the redcoat until he hung, limp and gasping, in my grip.

The goldsmith had turned suddenly upon the crowd.

"Shame!" he cried. "Is this the self-control I and the others have sought to teach you? Would you spoil all? Do you want to spend the rest of your days in the barracks prison while your wives and babes starve? Have done, I tell you, and disperse!"

"My father," I remarked, as the men hesitated, "has told me the Boston rebels are but windy cowards. Now I see 'tis true. There is no danger to the King's peace from such timid folk who can be cowed into peace by one tradesman's word and by sight of a redcoat. Where is the constable, Master Goldsmith?"

"As I have told you," urged the goldsmith, "let the fellow go. Thanks to your courage and strength, I have back what he stole. Seldom is it that Boston men receive even so much redress from those who pillage them. Were we to hale him to the guardhouse his word would be taken before ours. He would be set free, and some of us would sleep in jail this night. You are from the country, young sir, and you do not understand. But I"——

"But you are a pack of cowards," I stormed. "If none of you will aid me I shall take this cur to the guardhouse single-handed. In which direction does it lie?"

"No, no," begged the goldsmith, "be warned. If"——

"I say I shall do it!" I raged. "If there is justice in Boston"——

"There is not. And"——

"Hallo!" spoke up a drawling, authoritative voice from behind me. "What treasonable coil and brawling have we here? Odsnobs, canaille, stand aside. I command you, and let me through to see what all this rumpus is about!"

CHAPTER III.

I Change My Mind.

AT the scornful command the crowd sullkily gave way. A man and a girl had just emerged from a cross street leading down from Beacon Hill. Though it was the man who had spoken, and who now came forward ahead of his companion, yet it was the girl on whom my eyes first fell.

And as our gaze met—I knew her for Marjory Winthrop. The big eyes widened from amused recognition to an admiration not unmixed with trouble as she saw that I held captive a wriggling British soldier.

Meantime her companion, Sir William Howe, had made his way to where the goldsmith, the soldier and I were standing, pushing his path through the press as though through a kennel of dogs.

"What does this mean?" he cried in haughty wonder.

"It means, Sir William," I retorted, too angry to be cautious, "that one American is not too cowed at sight of a red uniform to catch a thief and bring him to justice."

"May it please you, Sir William," sputtered my prisoner, "this Yankee brute grabs me as I'm going along peaceful-like and"——

"Silence!" ordered Howe curtly. Then to me:

"What do you mean, you young Goliath, by choking a King's man? Unhand him!"

"He is a thief," I said doggedly, "and"——

"If you undertook to choke all thieves, those big hands of yoürs would soon be worn off at the wrist," answered Howe. "Let him go, I say!"

"I will not. He stole a gold handled fan from this goldsmith. And he shall go to jail for it."

"It's a lie, Sir William!" squealed the soldier. "I just"——

"If he has been at fault," said Howe, "the provost marshal will know how to deal with him. It is not for a pack of Yankee rascals to lay hands on His Majesty's uniform. Let him go free!"

"And encourage every other redcoat thief to steal, unpunished?" I returned. "Not I."

"Do you know who I am? I"——

"I know. But you are not my master. And I hold this scoundrel until the constable comes."

"Then you will hold him till doomsday, you Yankee rebel! I say, let him"——

"I am no rebel!" I flashed. "I am as stanch a King's man as yourself. This soldier stole a valuable fan. There it is"—indicating the trinket the goldsmith was still holding—"and I"——

"Oh, my fan!" cried Marjory, catching sight of it. "My fan!"

She hurried forward. Sir William glanced whimsically from her to the fan, and then back to me.

"This puts a new face on the affair," he observed carelessly. "Mistress Marjory, I am at your pretty feet imploring fifty thousand pardons that a man of mine should have laid sacrilegious hand on aught you cherish. Believe me, he shall be punished."

The general set a silver whistle to his lips and blew a shrill note thereon.

"As for this shaggy Hercules," he went on, "I suppose, for your sake, I must reward him, instead of letting him cool his heels in the city prison. A proper fine giant he is, I confess. But"——

Three troopers, summoned by the whistle, came down the street at a run. Howe broke off in his careless speech, turned to them, and, indicating my captive, said:

"Take him to the provost. Say that I order for him fifty stripes on the bare back and fifty days in the guardhouse."

The men moved away with the cringing soldier. Howe again turned toward me.

"You have done an ill thing," quoth he, "in venturing to lay hands on a soldier of the King. If such acts were to pass unpunished, you Yankees would soon get the notion you were human beings. And then where would the sacred authority of England be? Nevertheless, you say you are loyal. And you have been so lucky as to do this fair lady a service. So take this instead."

He flipped a golden guinea toward me. I caught it and flung it into the mud at his feet.

He reddened at the bold act. Then, with a shrug, observed:

"As you will. Mistress Marjory, the sight of your face is so great reward that mere gold seems to him as dross by comparison. Shall we continue our walk? I fear the sight of so many rebels has spoiled your morning. In summer, the flies; in winter, the rebels. I know not which are worse."

She took his proffered arm without a word and they moved away. But as they went she cast over her shoulder a look—not at the fan the goldsmith still held, but at my surprised, confused self.

Again our eyes met. I could not read the look in hers. Yet somehow it set me all atingle.

And the goldsmith spoke to me twice before I could draw away my own dazed glance from the dainty little retreating figure. As she passed out of sight the world seemed strangely dull.

The goldsmith was leading me toward his shop, a few doors away.

"You are hurt," he was saying. "Come in and let me stanch the wound."

I glanced down at my left arm. Through the slash made by the bayonet drops of red were spreading.

In my excitement I had taken no note of the injury. Even now it seemed to me too petty a matter to call for such solicitude.

Nevertheless I suffered myself to be led into the quaint, dim interior of the shop. The goldsmith made me sit in a big chair while he bustled off in search of lint and warm water.

The crowd had melted away. Only one or two clerks and apprentices remained.

I glanced about the shop in real interest. The walls were hung with odd prints, save where shelf space was taken up with rows of gold and silver ornaments that gleamed lividly from behind their thick glass cases.

Bits of filigree work, rings, fans and other trinkets were piled high on a table behind the counter. In a rear room stood a tiny forge, and near it a printing press. At a window was a bench with a set of engravers' tools. And through that same window I could read the swinging street sign's legend:

PAUL REVERE,
Goldsmith and Engraver.

The next moment my host had returned, his arms full of bandages and such stuff.

He deposited his burden on the floor, stripped off my coat, and with the tender touch of a woman proceeded to lay bare my throbbing arm.

The cut was not deep nor in any way dangerous. But the sharp east wind of Boston had gotten into it and it stung cruelly.

Also I was a trifle dizzy from loss of blood and from so much excitement.

Therefore I willingly allowed the goldsmith to wash and bind the wound, leaning back, meanwhile and watching with admiration his deft skill as a surgeon.

"This is not the first hurt you have dressed," I hazarded.

"I wish I might hope it would be the last," he made answer. "No, it is not the first. I learned this sort of work in the Crown Point campaign against the French in 1756. I was a lieutenant of artillery there."

"A lieutenant of artillery in '56?" I queried. "You can scarce be above forty or forty-five now."

"I am but forty," he said, working as he talked. "Great events bring forth the men to meet them. And those men often are mere lads. I was scarce twenty-one at the time of Crown Point campaign. Yet our captain was but nineteen. Like myself, he was promoted from the ranks."

"For bravery?" I asked, suddenly interested.

He laughed.

"In the rough days of the French and Indian war," he answered, "there was scant political preferment. Men were promoted for bravery—or not at all."

"I have oft heard of that great campaign against Crown Point," said I, watching his busy fingers tie the last knot in the bandages. "My father has told me how a handful of sturdy New England Colonists went forth into the hostile wilderness, how they fought starvation, wild beasts and fiercer Indians, and at the last against fearful odds captured France's strongest fort. Is it so?"

"It is so," he agreed gravely.

"Yet," I pursued, "to-day, you—the man who dared such perils—shrank in fear from arresting one British soldier. Do advancing years bring cowardice?"

"Young man," he said sternly, "it is ever the way of youth to judge a jewel casket's contents by its exterior. Therefore I overlook your insult. The name of Paul Revere may not live in my country's history; but if it does not 'twill not be because I am a coward. Let that suffice."

"I ask pardon if I have offended," I muttered, half ashamed. "Yet to see a Crown Point hero cringe before a thieving redcoat irked me. The jewels must be over fine to justify as tarnished a casket."

Yes, it was a boorish, brutal speech, I know that. I had the grace to realize it, vaguely, even then.

What better can one expect of a farm lad on his first contact with real men?

(To Be Continued.)

The Day of Rest

By Maurice Ketten